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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000232

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SUBJECT: CODEL DURBIN VISIT TO GOMA, DRC

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Senators Richard Durbin and Sherrod Brown traveled to Goma, DRC from February 15-16, 2010. The Senators, accompanied by Ms. Connie Schultz (wife of Senator Brown) and four staff members, visited an IDP camp, a hospital specialized in treating victims of sexual violence, and met with MONUC representatives, as well as a cross section of international and national NGO and civil society members. Press coverage of the visit highlighted Senator Durbin's call for Congolese, Rwandan, and international efforts to address ongoing insecurity related to the FDLR presence in eastern DRC. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Responding in part to recent reporting from New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof, Senator Durbin and Senator Brown visited Goma, DRC from February 15-16, 2010. CODEL Durbin's first stop was the Mugunga 3 internally displaced persons (IDP) camp on the outskirts of Goma. The delegation met with camp leaders, visited health, water/sanitation and livelihoods facilities, and discussed areas of concern with staff of UNHCR and NGOs providing services in the camp. Multiple IDP interlocutors told the Senators that their areas of origin, primarily Walikale, Rutshuru, and Masisi territories, continued to be highly insecure, with the camp president saying she "would never return."

¶3. (SBU) CODEL Durbin also visited the Heal Africa hospital, where they received a tour of the USG-supported facilities, as well as a briefing on efforts to combat and respond to sexual violence by Heal Africa, as well as the American Bar Association, which maintains an office at the hospital to legally pursue cases of rape.

¶4. (SBU) In briefings with the acting head of Eastern Coordination for the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), Spyros Demetriou, and other MONUC officials, CODEL Durbin were informed of the location and activities of the remaining non-integrated Congolese armed groups as well as the LRA and FDLR, originating from Uganda and Rwanda respectively. MONUC briefed on the transition from Kimia II to Amani Leo operations to be planned jointly by the FARDC and MONUC, including the conditionality provisions requiring MONUC to cease support for any Congolese forces engaging in Human Rights violations.

¶5. (SBU) The delegation met with a cross-section of Congolese civil society, as well as representatives of the international humanitarian community in a roundtable at the USG Office in Goma.

Participants included Justine Bihamba (Synergie des Femmes), Immaculee Ibirhaheka, Promotion et appui aux Initiatives Feminines (PAIF), Delly Mawazo Sesete, Centre de Recherche sur l'Environnement, la Democratie et les Droits de l'Homme (CREDDHO), Alois Tegera, Pole Institute, Ulrika Blom-Mondlane, Norwegian Refugee Council, Esteban Saccoe, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and 081 988 Edem Blege, Civil Affairs Coordinator, North Kivu Brigade HQ, MONUC. Discussion focused on the role of mineral exploitation in conflict in eastern Congo, sexual violence, as well as challenges to humanitarian response. Senator Durbin sought views on how to prevent illegal exploitation of minerals by focusing on companies marketing products containing these "blood minerals" in the United States. A recurring theme was the weakness, or absence of the Congolese state and its inability to provide security or other basic services to populations in eastern DRC.

¶6. (SBU) In a breakfast meeting with Human Rights Watch (HRW) researchers Anneke Van Woudenberg and Ida Sawyer, CODEL Durbin pressed for recommendations on concrete action the USG could take to limit the extensive human rights abuses that have marked recent MONUC-supported FARDC military operations in the Kivus. Van Woudenberg and Sawyer pushed for the USG to pressure the GDRC to arrest CNDP-leader and ICC-indictee Bosco Ntaganda, and to ensure that MONUC strictly applied its policy of conditionality under Amani Leo. HRW passed the Senators a letter naming fifteen FARDC

KINSHASA 00000232 002 OF 002

commanders with records of gross human rights violations that the organization had sent to MONUC and the FARDC with the hopes of preventing their participation in Amani Leo operations.

¶7. (SBU) From human rights, the Senators were able to also raise animal rights concerns with two organizations working on primate conservation, the Jane Goodall Institute and the Diane Fossey Gorilla Fund International (both USAID-funded). CODEL Durbin visited the offices of the latter organization, where orphaned gorillas rescued from poachers were being raised in enclosures in downtown Goma.

¶8. (SBU) Press Coverage: Senator Durbin gave interviews to the Goma-based AFP stringer, who traveled with the delegation to Mugunga 3 IDP camp and Heal Africa, and to a journalist with UN-supported Radio Okapi. Press coverage of the visit highlighted Senator Durbin's call for Congolese, Rwandan, and international efforts to address ongoing insecurity related to the FDLR presence in eastern DRC and his suggestion that the Government of Rwanda publish the names of FDLR fighters accused of violating human rights.

¶9. (U) CODEL Durbin has cleared this cable.  
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